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EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE OF THE PROGRAMME OF THE UNITED NATIONS
HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR REFUGEES

Fifty-second session

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 552nd MEETING

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva,
on Monday, 1 October 2001, at 10 a.m.

Temporary Chairman: Mr. KHORRAM (Islamic Republic of Iran)

Chairman: Mr. MOLANDER (Sweden)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.15 a.m.

OPENING OF THE SESSION (item 1 of the provisional agenda)

1. The TEMPORARY CHAIRMAN declared open the fifty-second session of the Executive Committee of the Programme of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.

TRIBUTE TO THE MEMORY OF THE VICTIMS OF THE TERRORIST ACTS OF 11 SEPTEMBER 2001 IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

2. The TEMPORARY CHAIRMAN, on behalf of all the members of the Executive Committee, expressed sympathy to the Government of the United States of America in connection with the recent terrorist attacks. Members of the Executive Committee were requested to observe a minute's silence.

STATEMENT BY THE OUTGOING CHAIRMAN

3. The TEMPORARY CHAIRMAN, speaking in his capacity as Chairman of the fifty-first session, said that he had enjoyed excellent cooperation with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) throughout his tenure. With the arrival of a new management team at UNHCR, the past year had been a time of change and transition. His first priority had been to encourage and enhance dialogue between host developing countries and cash donor countries. In their own way, however, host countries were themselves donors. In any event, it was important to ensure that they were not left to cope with refugee influxes on their own; they needed to be reassured that they formed part of a broad strategy supported by the international community. As Chairman of the Executive Committee, he had proposed the need for just such a global strategy to address the root causes of situations of mass influx, and to that end he had authorized meetings at various levels between host and donor countries. His second priority had been to improve staff security. Fortunately, no further tragedies involving UNHCR staff had occurred, but continued vigilance was essential.

4. The past year had also witnessed some very positive achievements, for example action on a UNHCR Pledging Conference and commemoration of a World Refugee Day. Work on international protection was proceeding and greater attention had been paid to programme and funding issues. He had used his position to insist on the need for a more equitable geographical distribution of UNHCR staff and had consistently advocated international solidarity and burden-sharing. Finally, he had made extremely valuable field visits to refugee camps in Thailand and the Caucasus.

ELECTION OF OFFICERS (item 2 of the provisional agenda)

5. Mr. BERGH JOHANSEN (Norway) nominated Mr. Molander (Sweden) for the office of Chairman.

6. Ms. de HOZ (Argentina) and Mr. KHATIB (United Republic of Tanzania) seconded the nomination.

7. Mr. Molander (Sweden) was elected Chairman by acclamation.

8. Mr. AYEWOH (Nigeria) nominated Mr. Yimer (Ethiopia) for the office of Vice-Chairman.

9. Mr. NOIRFALISSE (Belgium) and Mr. RAMEL (Philippines) seconded the nomination.

10. Mr. Yimer (Ethiopia) was elected Vice-Chairman by acclamation.

11. Mr. SHEN Yongxiang (China) nominated Mr. Kishimori (Japan) for the office of Rapporteur.

12. Mr. MOCTEZUMA-BARRAGÁN (Mexico) seconded the nomination.

13. Mr. Kishimori (Japan) was elected Rapporteur by acclamation.

14. Mr. Molander (Sweden) took the Chair.

STATEMENT BY THE CHAIRMAN

15. The CHAIRMAN said that he regarded his election as a recognition of Sweden's role in international refugee protection as a generous asylum country and a major donor to UNHCR and other humanitarian organizations. He would endeavour to continue his predecessor's efforts to enhance dialogue between States and ensure staff security, and he looked forward to working with the new High Commissioner, Mr. Ruud Lubbers. He intended to travel to one or several of UNHCR's field operations to see humanitarian work and the situation of refugees at first hand. It was essential to remember that the Executive Committee's discussions should be anchored in day-to-day experiences in the field.

16. The circumstances which forced refugees to flee in the first place, and the situation they found themselves in after their flight, were the central problems of mass influxes. Efforts should be made to restore refugees' dignity and encourage them to contribute to development, both in their countries of asylum and after they returned home. Refugee women had a special role in that context. They constituted an under-utilized resource that could be better employed.

17. The level of commitment among donors to fund the 2002 UNHCR Annual Programme Budget would become apparent in the course of the current session. In the meantime, it was clear that mechanisms for funding and burden-sharing needed to be refined. The Standing Committee had asked for further discussions on that issue, and informal consultations would be organized accordingly. In addition, non-cash contributors to UNHCR should be given greater visibility and acknowledgement. A process of Global Consultations on international protection had been initiated. At the Ministerial Meeting scheduled for December 2001, States parties to the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and its Protocol would have an opportunity to reaffirm the importance of those instruments in the global protection regime and

their continued commitment to the principles and provisions enshrined therein. In the so-called "third track", the Executive Committee had mapped out an approach to a format discussing protection needs in the context of new challenges not foreseen by the 1951 Convention. It was to be hoped that the Global Consultations would identify challenges and indicate follow-up action leading to reinforcement of the international refugee protection regime.

18. The international community had rightly condemned the recent terrorist attacks in the United States of America. But shock and outrage should not become a pretext for undermining the right to seek or obtain asylum or a pretext for animosity against asylum-seekers, refugees or foreigners in general. Nor should those heinous crimes obscure the fact that refugees were entitled to a solution to their problems.

ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA AND OTHER ORGANIZATIONAL MATTERS (item 3 of the provisional agenda) (A/AC.96/LII/L.1)

19. The agenda was adopted.

GENERAL DEBATE (agenda item 4)

Opening statement by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

20. Mr. LUBBERS (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees), addressing his first plenary session of the Executive Committee, said that he had been very impressed by the high calibre and dedication of the Office's staff and paid tribute, in particular, to his predecessor, Ms. Sadako Ogata.

21. Recalling the foremost challenge for UNHCR identified by Ms. Ogata at the 2000 Executive Committee session, namely, the need to strengthen the emergency preparedness and response capacity of UNHCR, he reviewed recent efforts by the Office in facing new emergencies, including crises in Guinea, where it had helped ensure safe access to and safe passage for refugees, and in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, where more than 100,000 people had fled their homes. Over the first eight months of 2001, UNHCR had provided emergency support to 22 countries.

22. The barbaric terrorist attacks on the United States of America on 11 September and the unfolding humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan and surrounding countries were a sobering reminder that emergencies were hard to predict. With a view to enhancing its emergency preparedness and response capacity, UNHCR had taken steps to improve staff training and increase the number of deployable emergency core staff, formed new standby arrangements with Governments and partners and built up its emergency stockpile. With regard to the current humanitarian emergency in and around Afghanistan, where a massive relief operation was needed, he hoped that donors would respond positively to the UNHCR appeal for US$ 268 million to cover the following six months, in order to prepare for an influx of up to 1.5 million refugees into neighbouring countries, in particular Pakistan and the Islamic Republic of Iran. The current unprecedented global effort to combat terrorism should be matched by a comparable effort on the humanitarian front.

23. Turning to another serious challenge for UNCHR, staff security, he recalled the brutal murders of UNHCR colleagues in West Timor, Guinea and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and those of members of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC). As a tribute to slain colleagues, a permanent memorial would be inaugurated in December 2001 before the UNHCR headquarters building, which would serve as a constant reminder that the organization could not protect refugees if it was unable to ensure the safety of its own staff.

24. Enhancing staff security would remain one of his major priorities. While the mission of UNHCR staff members could never be without risks, there were limits as to what they could accept and proper training and the provision of essential technical equipment were basic minimum conditions for operating at remote duty stations. While some measures had been taken over the past year to enhance the security of staff, major problems remained. In particular, he had strongly protested to the authorities in Indonesia about the unacceptably light sentences given to those responsible for the murder of the UNHCR staff in West Timor and he had called for steps to ensure that there was no impunity for those who attacked humanitarian staff. To achieve improved security, additional funding was undoubtedly needed.

25. Another major challenge for UNHCR related to the management of complex population flows, including mixed flows of refugees, asylum-seekers and other migrants, and mixed-motive migration, where people left their homes for a combination of political, economic and other reasons. With the closure of regular arrival routes, refugees were increasingly turning to smugglers and traffickers or portraying themselves as refugees to overcome immigration barriers. As a result, refugees were often stigmatized in the public mind. He appealed to Governments to find ways of handling asylum applications more quickly and fairly and to politicians and people in receiving countries to avoid stereotyping all asylum-seekers as bogus, if not criminal.

26. The problem of refugees had to be addressed not only by offering protection but also through durable solutions, such as voluntary repatriation, local integration and resettlement. Failure to provide such solutions led to the degradation of refugees, a rise in crime and the threat of further conflict and instability, with more refugees languishing in refugee camps, taking desperate measures to find safety and a better future and being exploited by criminal networks.

27. For the sustainable local integration of refugees and reintegration of returnees, the gap between emergency relief and longer term development must be closed. It was regrettable that most development assistance excluded refugees. In Africa, for instance, which was home to more than 5.3 million persons of concern to UNHCR, sustainable development would be very difficult to achieve if the productive capacities of refugees were ignored. A similar challenge was faced in other parts of the world as well, such as the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, where several hundred thousand refugees might never return home. Their future would now depend on reconstruction and development activities in Serbia, not on humanitarian aid.

28. Appealing for a more enlightened and integrated view of refugees, he pointed out that they were not simply the beneficiaries of human aid, but also potential contributors to development. The relationship of refugees to development should therefore be rethought, not at conferences in remote venues, but in the field, with the involvement of donors and partners. To

that end, he repeated his call to donors to earmark a modest share of development assistance funding for the interrelated issues of refugees, internally displaced people and affected local populations.

29. Another challenge arose from xenophobia and intolerance, against which UNHCR had launched its "Imagine Coexistence" initiative in 2000, with pilot projects in Bosnia and Herzegovina and in Rwanda. He warned that xenophobia might increase, as it had in the wake of the recent terrorist attacks, with discriminatory assaults on people of Muslim origin, and might lead to further discrimination against refugees, asylum-seekers and minority groups.

30. Turning to the question of organizational management, he reviewed the measures he had taken over his first nine months in office to sharpen the focus of UNHCR and to strengthen its capacity to meet the challenges of the future. He had created a core top management team, referred to as a "seamless troika", comprising himself, the Deputy High Commissioner and the Assistant High Commissioner. Under the new structure, the Director of the Division of International Protection would continue to report directly to the High Commissioner. All internal resource management issues were channelled through the Deputy High Commissioner, whose role had been significantly strengthened, and all operational management issues through the Assistant High Commissioner. He stressed the need, in strategic planning, for the Office to focus less on inputs and more on performance, systematically evaluating its activities and following up this evaluation with appropriate corrective action. He had also taken steps to revitalize senior management, pointing out that he had thereby not only introduced new talent into the Organization but also improved the gender balance and geographical diversity of its senior management. Among measures he had taken to strengthen internal investigation and oversight mechanisms, he noted in particular the comprehensive reform plan currently being implemented in Kenya, in the light of instances of corruption in the Nairobi office, and expressed his determination to ensure that such abuse was eliminated and that resettlement remained a key protection tool.

31. Recalling the 20 per cent budget freeze imposed on all UNHCR operations across the board when he had taken up his appointment and the view expressed in some quarters that UNHCR was unfocused, he drew attention to the "Actions 1, 2 and 3" exercise, by which the 2001 budget had been reduced by roughly 10 per cent and the number of staff posts by 16 per cent.

32. Action 1, defining UNHCRs core activities and strategic direction, had been completed, but donor reactions had been mixed. Some had urged UNHCR to re-prioritize its activities and even withdraw from certain sectors, while others had been reluctant to abandon specific proposals. A particularly contentious issue had been the Office's role with respect to internally displaced persons, who currently constituted almost a third of the people of concern to UNHCR. It was his view that programmes to assist the internally displaced should be contingent upon additional funding being made available by donors. Accordingly, in September 2001, he had issued new operational guidelines clarifying criteria for UNHCRs involvement in that area. He wanted to stress UNHCRs commitment to internally displaced persons, whose situation was comparable to that of refugees: there was no reason to discriminate between the two groups.

33. Action 2 had entailed a thorough review of UNHCRs operations and internal structure, setting priorities on the basis of Action 1 and aiming at greater austerity and efficiency. The revised needs for 2001 currently stood at US$ 882 million (excluding the Afghanistan emergency operation), and he had proposed a budget of US$ 828 million for 2002. The Office's efforts to boost its efficiency were illustrated by the significant staff cuts it had already made, even though there had been no real change in the number of people of concern to the Office. Furthermore, while most of the savings had been made in the field rather than at headquarters, between 1995 and 2000 there had been a 34 per cent reduction in headquarters expenditure and he was therefore convinced that headquarters was currently close to its optimum size.

34. Under the implementation phase of Action 2, 11 country offices would be closed and the Office's staff reduced by 16 per cent, or 760 posts. To minimize the negative effects of this painful undertaking, UNHCR had taken a number of steps, with the constructive cooperation of the Staff Council, including early retirement and voluntary separation programmes. In addition, a total of 219 staff had been reassigned under an accelerated postings procedure. In his view, the resulting savings had been sufficient, when seen in the historical context of the ratio between the numbers of people of concern to UNHCR and its budget. The current working budget was less than US$ 40 per year for each person of concern, which was considerably lower than in previous years. In his view, the current budget was an absolute minimum and already insufficient to meet certain important needs.

35. Action 3 - fund-raising - was an ongoing process. While he appreciated the efforts of countries hosting refugee populations and of countries of resettlement, there was a need for adequate cash contributions. Donors should consider a minimum level of contributions to UNHCR, commensurate with its global mandate. An amount of US$ 1 or €1 per citizen was an objective that richer countries that did not do so already could attain. The Office was seeking to diversify its support base by upgrading its private sector fund-raising efforts, appointing a special representative to the Organization of the Islamic Conference and the League of Arab States, and promoting dialogue with the European Union.

36. While UNHCR might, in some cases, improve its performance with the same level of funding, in other cases it could do so only with additional resources. A way must be found to avoid the chronic budget shortfalls of late; such shortfalls impacted negatively on both quality and performance and further weakened the Office's ability to mobilize resources. He urged donors that had pledged funds for the last quarter of 2001 to make their contributions in a timely manner - some US$ 100 million was outstanding, and even then there would still be a shortfall of some US$ 50 million. Contributions for the Afghan emergency operation were, of course, welcome, but should not be at the expense of other programmes. Commitments received to date for 2002 provided only partial reassurance that the proposed programme budget would be fully funded. He hoped that donors would not reduce their level of funding but that, on the contrary, they would increase their contributions so that UNHCR would become a truly multilateral organization, sharing the burden among member States.

37. Recent crises had illustrated the severity of the refugee problem and the need for UNHCR to adapt to a changing international political environment. There were many threats: restrictive interpretation of the 1951 United Nations Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, the deteriorating quality of asylum, the burden of hosting refugees and the perceived

abuse of asylum. Against that backdrop, the Global Consultations on International Protection had been launched to promote the effective implementation of the 1951 Convention and develop new approaches to ensure international protection and durable solutions. In that connection, the States parties to the 1951 Convention would meet in December 2001 with a view to adopting a declaration. The Global Consultations provided an opportunity for dialogue, and would help to shape an agenda for protection in the years ahead. Fruitful discussions had already taken place and expected outcomes included new policy approaches and operational guidelines. The result would be a roadmap reflecting shared strategic goals and recommending key actions.

38. The question arose of whether or not UNHCR - as it stood in legal terms, as it was positioned within the United Nations system and as it was currently funded - would be able to meet the challenges ahead. To address that question he had launched the "UNHCR 2004" process, to be concluded by 1 January 2004, when the current mandate was due for renewal.

39. With regard to the fight against international terrorism, the rising tide of xenophobia and intolerance had to be resisted: no people, no region and no religion should be condemned because of the unspeakable acts of a few. Refugees and asylum seekers were vulnerable in the current climate, and Afghans, who constituted the largest refugee population in the world, were particularly vulnerable. A war on terrorism must not become a war on Afghans or on Islam. Each of the solutions for refugee problems - voluntary repatriation, local integration and resettlement - was attainable only on the basis of respect. Everyone shared in the responsibility of ensuring respect for the individual dignity and worth of every refugee. Politicians and the media had a special responsibility to combat racism, xenophobia and intolerance, and must resist the temptation to make scapegoats of refugees.

Statement by the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights

40. Ms. ROBINSON (United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights) said that in the shadow of the crimes against humanity perpetrated against civilians in the United States of America, UNHCR again stood at the centre of world affairs. The atrocities would have profound implications for the United Nations, with the escalating humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan and surrounding countries.

41. The work of ensuring protection for vulnerable persons necessitated a wide range of actions and strategies. While the work would vary depending on the mandate of the organization involved, there were no competing understandings of the core nature of protection work, namely the safeguarding of the rights and dignity of the individual. That core nature flowed from the three legal foundations of refugee law, international humanitarian law and international human rights law. Considerable effort had been devoted to clarifying the implications for protection work of those three bodies of law. Experience had been gained from the work of the Commission on Human Rights and the human rights treaty bodies, as well as the work carried out by human rights field operations and the mainstreaming of human rights throughout the United Nations system. A clearer understanding had been reached of the implications of human rights for the work of protection. Nevertheless her Office needed to learn from the accumulated experience of UNHCR and the International Committee of the Red Cross.

42. The Secretary-General had drawn attention to the relationship between human rights and fundamental standards of humanity, and UNHCR had provided helpful clarification of the role of human rights and its relationship to refugee law in its Note on international protection. The task of addressing the human rights aspect of the work of protection was a common responsibility, and her Office would make vigorous efforts to be of service in the work of protection in the field. It would focus on three main categories: providing human rights technical advice and assistance for the undertaking of protection activities; assisting initiatives to combat impunity; and assisting advocacy efforts on behalf of victims, inter alia through enhanced human rights monitoring, reporting and analysis. Her Office would also strive to engage more effectively the full range of human rights protection and promotion instruments.

43. Within the framework of the coordinated United Nations response to the crisis in Afghanistan, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights had made itself available to be of all possible assistance to its sister agencies, funds and operations. That partnership would be of immediate help in addressing the critical protection needs of the Afghan people.

44. Mr. FOLEY (United States of America) expressed his country's gratitude for the condolences proffered by the Executive Committee in connection with the terrorist acts of 11 September 2001. Those terrible events served to underscore the importance of the work of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.

45. UNHCR had faced change and challenges in 2001: funding shortfalls leading to budgetary and staffing cutbacks, renewed focus on the core mandate of protection, new problems in the Balkans, continued insecurity in west Africa, and now a potential new crisis in the Afghan refugee situation. His Government was confident that countries in the region would open their doors to refugees fleeing Afghanistan, as they had so generously in the past. The United States stood ready, together with others, to provide humanitarian support. The year 2001 marked the fiftieth anniversary of the 1951 Convention, and was a year when all must reaffirm their commitment to the international refugee regime.

46. The High Commissioner needed to address several key issues. Firstly, the prioritization of UNHCRs activities, with an emphasis on the mandate responsibilities of protection and durable solutions and on agreements with other organizations to ensure that all assistance needs were met. In that regard his Government commended the High Commissioner for his Action 1 initiative, refocusing the Office on its core protection mandate. His delegation was, however, concerned that insufficient attention was paid to physical protection, especially of women and children, and urged UNHCR to take immediate measures to increase its protection presence in the field. While repatriation remained the preferred durable solution, he welcomed the reaffirmation of the importance of resettlement as both a durable solution and a protection tool. Secondly, with regard to the call for a global recommitment to the international protection regime, he commended UNHCR on putting together the Global Consultations and welcomed the convening of the December 2001 meeting. He hoped that those efforts would reinforce the commitment to the implementation of the Convention and Protocol, and encourage others to accede to them. Thirdly, emergency response mechanisms must be strengthened Progress by UNHCR in that area was exemplified by its response to the emergency in Macedonia and the impending crisis in south Asia. Such rapid and well-organized deployments of staff and

resources should become the norm whenever UNHCR was called upon. Fourthly, there was a need to move forward quickly on security of both refugees and humanitarian workers. And lastly, food aid constituted a further challenge. The World Food Programme must receive the support it needed to carry out its responsibilities towards refugees.

47. Millions of refugees around the world were in need of care and protection. Neither those refugees nor the countries that so generously hosted them must be forgotten. For its part, his Government would continue to contribute its fair share to the budget of UNHCR. He regretted that the Office had been forced to move to a resource-based budget, and he looked forward to the "sauter" phase of the High Commissioner's plan in 2003. He called on other donors to renew their commitment to the international refugee regime and to provide support for UNHCR's protection and assistance programmes around the world.

48. Mr. NOIRFALISSE (Belgium), speaking on behalf of the European Union and, in addition, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia and Turkey, welcomed the plan of action introduced by the High Commissioner. He stressed the importance of assuring the safety of humanitarian workers.

49. Despite stabilization in some regions, elsewhere conflict continued to erupt. The European Union was making significant efforts to assist in the critical situation prevailing in Afghanistan.

50. His delegation fully supported the efforts undertaken by the High Commissioner to improve the functioning of the Office, bearing in mind budget constraints, and the situation of refugees. UNHCR was a key actor in the quest for global stability and durable solutions. The actions 1, 2 and 3 initiative was of great interest and should produce the desired results. The evaluation function would remain a priority. The European Union was in consultation with UNHCR with a view to placing its funding on a more stable and predictable basis. The 1951 Convention remained the cornerstone of the regime of international protection, and had inspired other, regional instruments. He noted in that regard that the principle of non-refoulement had long been part of international customary law. The mandate of the Office - international protection, humanitarian assistance to refugees and the quest for durable solutions - remained valid. An objective system of asylum required a series of measures, including, as a last resort, the involuntary return, with due respect for humanitarian concerns, of those who did not need international protection.

51. The European Union welcomed the Global Consultations on International Protection, and would play an active role in the formulation of an agenda for protection. Some elements would fall within the mandate of UNHCR, and others within the purview of States. It was important for the preliminary agenda to be made available to member States well in advance of the December meeting. The European Union sought to bring the priorities of UNHCR and the Union into alignment, and had been working on the formulation of its common asylum and immigration policy since 1999 so as to better meet contemporary challenges. The model adopted by the Union was unique in its comprehensive focus at the same time on political, human rights and development aspects in countries and regions of origin and transit. There must be in-depth consideration of immigration policy that took account of the changing circumstances of a multicultural society. The European Union had a balanced approach to legal migration in its

relations with those countries that were candidates for accession. A conference on legal migration, to be held in October 2001, would focus on the link between asylum and migration. The establishment of a system of asylum would benefit from implementation of a managed system of migration.

52. The European Union had reacted immediately to the terrorist attacks of 11 September in the United States. The European Commission had been mandated to carry out an urgent study on the maintenance of internal security in conformity with the obligations of international protection. The European Union would seek to defend the integrity of the institution of asylum, in accordance with the 1951 Convention, taking into account new threats and challenges. In that regard it reaffirmed its full support for UNHCR.

53. Mr. HARAGUCHI said Japan was pleased to see that the three-pronged internal review seemed to have moved UNHCR onto the right track, although some fine tuning of its efforts might still be required. With regard to Action 1, concerning the definition of core activities, he pointed out that only half of the 22 million people of concern to UNHCR were refugees; the rest were asylum-seekers, returnees, internally displaced persons and others. UNHCR might require some flexibility in order to deal with the shift in priorities. For example, although it was not considered a core activity, it might be appropriate to pay due attention to the reintegration of returned refugees as an incentive to cooperative Governments. Such an approach would be useful in cases such as that of Muslims from Rakhine State in Myanmar, where UNHCR could play a catalytic role in finding a durable solution.

54. He was pleased to note that the initial anxiety among staff and host countries caused by the downsizing activities of Action 2 had subsided, thanks to the High Commissioner's wise leadership. He was convinced that a lean and more efficient structure would enable UNHCR to operate more cost-effectively and further advance its various partnerships. With regard to Action 3, he stressed that, although it was urgent for all donors to address the chronic budget shortfall and underfunding, better coordination among donors was equally important.

55. As to his own Government's contribution to UNHCR's goals, he said Japan's core contribution had accounted for between 10 and 15 per cent of UNHCR's annual budget for the past 10 years. As a result of economic stagnation, however, Japan's entire Official Development Assistance (ODA) budget for 2002 was to be decreased by 10 per cent. He was therefore unable to indicate how much Japan would be contributing to UNHCR in 2002. In addition, Japan's voluntary contributions, including those to UNHCR, would be adversely affected by the depreciation of the Japanese yen against the United States dollar. In the meantime, progress had been made in enhancing UNHCR's predictability and flexibility with the allocation of funds through a single tranche contribution with broader earmarking. Japan also contributed to the Human Security Fund [E/1999/SR.18, §63], which had already provided funds to establish the UNHCR Regional Centre for Emergency Training for NGO and government officials in Asia and the Pacific, and to the "Imagine Coexistence" initiative in Bosnia and Rwanda. The Fund also intended to finance the IDP project in Colombia.

56. Lastly, his Government had been exploring a new pillar of cooperation with UNHCR, aimed at stronger linkage between development funds and their humanitarian impact. As UNHCR's strength was its field presence, Japanese embassies at the operational frontiers had

been instructed to work more closely with UNHCR. A precursor to that was the collaboration between the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) and UNHCR in Tanzania, which aimed to alleviate the burden borne by the host country and allow UNHCR to concentrate on refugee protection and assistance. He hoped that such cooperation would support the High Commissioner's vision of empowering refugees to work towards their own solutions and involving them in the development process.

57. In conclusion, he paid tribute to those who were engaged in humanitarian actions in difficult and dangerous conditions and particularly to those who had sacrificed their lives. Humanitarian work would never be without risk and measures must be devised to reduce those risks as much as possible.

58. Mr. BEHZADIAN (Islamic Republic of Iran) said that the recent terrorist attacks in the United States had brought the world face-to-face with a grave crisis that would undoubtedly have a political, social and economic impact in his region. His Government condemned the attacks, but believed the serious global campaign against terrorism needed a wise approach to avoid risking the lives of more innocent people and plunging the region into a new crisis of displaced persons.

59. For 20 years, Iran had hosted millions of refugees, migrants and displaced persons and was therefore familiar with the considerable social, economic, cultural, political and security problems that the rest of the world was beginning to witness. As a result of political instability, epidemics, terrorism and natural disasters in Afghanistan, with no sign of any sustainable development plan, large numbers of migrants, displaced persons and refugees had illegally entered Iran. In the aftermath of the terrorist attacks on the United States, Iran had closed its borders, but it was ready to facilitate efforts to meet a further refugee crisis by keeping air, marine and ground corridors open for the transit of humanitarian assistance inside Afghanistan and was already making arrangements to that effect with UNHCR, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC). The Afghan refugee problem was compounded by the fact that drug traffickers abused the protection afforded to genuine refugees and asylum-seekers. It was essential for UNHCR to discuss a mechanism to prevent that from happening.

60. His Government had a number of points to make that would help in implementing UNHCR's review process. Consideration should be given to a specific mechanism for more serious contributions by the international community; an appropriate mechanism for allocating contributions should be devised, based on the number and requirements of refugees; a distinction should be drawn between refugees and economic migrants; countries' representation in the structure of UNHCR should be commensurate with their role in hosting refugees or their cash contributions to UNHCR; and UNHCR's activities and budget should be optimized so that most of its resources were allocated to the refugee problem and the cost borne by host countries.

61. Although the Iranian Government appreciated the international community's contributions, they did not match the size of its refugee population. International assistance did not meet even one of the basic needs of Iran's refugees for one week. His Government's annual expenditure on refugees exceeded UNHCR's total annual budget. Having hosted the largest refugee population in the world for the longest time, Iran had recently adopted a Comprehensive

Plan for the Identification of Aliens, which represented a completely new approach to dealing with refugees. Some two and a half million refugees, migrants and displaced persons had been identified, 95 per cent of whom lived freely in various parts of the country and around five per cent in refugee camps.

62. Iran firmly believed that the refugee crisis demanded more serious contributions from the international community, particularly its richer members. The international community was jointly responsible for solving the global crisis and it was not fair for host countries to be left alone to cope with the consequences. Voluntary repatriation was the most durable solution and was closely linked with development in the countries of origin, particularly in such areas of infrastructure as health care, job opportunities, education and housing. For Iran, such development in the rural and urban areas close to the Afghan border, combined with serious de-mining efforts, constituted the top priority. Humanitarian and development work went hand in hand. Iran was ready to exchange views with the international community and to offer the benefit of its own experience in finding effective new approaches.

63. Ms. BEDLINGTON (Australia) said that the fiftieth anniversary of the Convention was a time for reflecting on the effectiveness of its implementation through the international protection framework. How well did the individual elements of that framework interact and how well did they work for individual refugees and host countries?

64. The largest, most complex and currently most topical case was the long-standing one of Afghan refugees. How had they fared with regard to key elements of the framework such as access to countries of first asylum, registration and status determination, support for countries of first asylum, sustainable repatriation, local integration and resettlement? First, there had been outstanding generosity from host countries in the region, particularly Iran and Pakistan, who had sheltered millions of prima facie refugees. Secondly, there had been limited access to registration and status determination. Recent screening programmes in Iran and Pakistan were a welcome development. Thirdly, support for countries of first asylum had clearly not met needs. Given the possibility of increases in refugee flows, the international community must demonstrate how it could increase its support. Fourthly, the size of the caseload had decreased only slowly. Problems within Afghanistan such as poor governance, human rights abuses, civil war and drought had meant very limited sustainable repatriation. The international protection framework had thus provided basic protection but not durable solutions, with the result that millions of people were living in uncertainty and poverty in border regions or found themselves at the mercy of people smugglers. The question was why. Were the numbers involved too large for existing approaches to cope with? Were the political dimensions too complex? Had it been assumed that it was a regional problem? Whatever the answers, comprehensive solutions must be found.

65. The recent terrorist attacks in the United States would place new pressures on the international protection framework, not only in terms of additional refugee flows but also in terms of willingness to provide asylum and resettlement. It was important not to let that happen and to work to preserve the commitment to respond. Responses would need to be planned, since the political dimensions had to be carefully managed. With humanitarian operations within Afghanistan severely constrained, the international community must also focus on neighbouring host countries and the creation and maintenance of immediate protection space. Her delegation

hoped that the forum convened by UNHCR and OCHA would lead to the development of a comprehensive, integrated strategy for addressing the problems of displaced Afghans. Australia was willing to provide up to US$ 150,000 to support the forum's activities. Moreover, her Government had recently committed an additional 14 million Australian dollars to the protection and assistance of Afghans in the region.

66. Mr. MOCTEZUMA-BARRAGÁN (Mexico) said that his Government attached great importance to the issue of refugees, and had recently drawn up a new asylum agenda. The first item on that agenda was completion of the process of integrating the Guatemalan refugees who had opted for resettlement and Mexican nationality, combined with the strengthening of Mexico's protection infrastructure, in particular through the establishment of an eligibility committee. The second item was Mexico's contribution to international protection for refugees, which would be based on the principles derived from its own tradition and experience. The first of those principles was that voluntary repatriation and full integration into host countries were the most durable solutions. The second principle was the vital need for prevention, either in the short-term, by strengthening national capacity to deal with refugee situations, or in the medium term, by eliminating the causes of refugee flows through economic and social development in all countries. The third principle was that international cooperation, solidarity and burden-sharing were key instruments in dealing with the refugee situation around the world. The fourth principle was that a human rights approach was needed in order to prevent the discrimination to which so many refugees were subjected.

67. The current global consultations would enable UNHCR and Governments jointly to draw up a world refugee agenda for the twenty-first century, on the basis of the Convention and its Protocol, non-refoulement and the fundamental role of UNHCR. They had also demonstrated the importance of reaching basic agreements on the causes of refugee situations. Of particular concern was the question of mixed flows and the relationship between migrants and refugees, whose characteristics and legal situation were quite distinct.

68. Mr. POPPE (Germany) said that UNHCR faced tremendous challenges, with unabated refugee flows in many parts of the world and the developments in Afghanistan demanding the utmost commitment from UNHCR's staff. At the same time, resources were limited and UNHCR was in the throes of implementing far-reaching but promising reforms.

69. His Government intended to help UNHCR fulfil its tasks. Despite serious budgetary constraints, Germany's basic contribution for the current year was DM 8.5 million - an increase of five per cent - and would be higher in 2002. UNHCR would remain Germany's major international project partner in the field of humanitarian assistance. Germany's expenditure of several billion deutsche mark on hosting refugees, repatriation programmes and crisis-prevention measures was a significant contribution towards avoiding new refugee flows. Germany welcomed and actively participated in the global consultations, which ran parallel to the measures towards harmonizing asylum law within the European Union.

70. With regard to the internal reform process, his delegation particularly welcomed the distinctions being made between core and non-core tasks, which had led to a reduction in the budget deficit. A number of specific issues, in particular the financing mechanisms, would certainly require further discussion, given their complexity, but overall the reforms would strengthen UNHCR's mandate and give it an enhanced political role in the protection of refugees.

71. In the light of recent developments, Germany had a special responsibility as the current chair of the Afghanistan Support Group. At its last meeting, the Support Group had announced a substantial increase in its contributions to Afghan refugees. On the same occasion, the German Minister for Foreign Affairs had announced a further DM 30 million in assistance to the region.

The meeting rose at 1 p.m.